

SONS OF THE RAIL

A STORY OF

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Oh! hearts in which bloom the red rose, not for you the quiet hearth, darkening fall of still eve and low of homeward kine, or even the hush of stole or cloister, the vexations of forum or mart. When deep in the center of your existence the petals stir into first life under the strong fingers of the head of their clan—the world old wonderlust—then the fragrance arises to brain, the hands grow tense and strong, the eyes bright and eager, the shackles of boyhood burst over the turgid swell of muscle and vein; then as the acid of field, flood, and storm fills the eager nostril the full-throated magician claims his own. To the weak few who fall and fall he throws only contempt and merited oblivion.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

John Gray, a young Virginian, is persuaded by Frank Howe, a railway employee, to leave postoffice farming and take up the life of a brakeman with him. John bids adieu to his aged father and mother, his old friends, Dr. Deane and daughter Madge, and follows Howe to Washington, where they start for Chicago. Near Harrisburg, Pa., a freight train, which they are traveling in, is wrecked. John for the first time understands the perils and tragedies of railroading.

CHAPTER IV—(Continued).

THE boys crossed to the window and stood silently looking out over the ghostly silence of the great river.

"Frank," said Gray, softly, "that scene reminds me of an old book in my father's library; it's a very chamber of horrors in type—Fox's Book of Martyrs! It is called."

As they stood there the trappings and fixtures of the nineteenth century seemed to fade into the agony and chill horror of the darkest days of Terquemada—nurse and doctor—the supposed champion of mercy and tender ministrations—to resolve into the grim outlines of the Judge of the Question. Why, their indifference seemed even intensified.

"It does look bad," answered Howe, "but it is a part of our work, a crushed, grimy, greasy, and mud-incrusted railroad victim possesses but little to appeal to the semi-dramatic point of view held by doctor and nurse, but the direct cause of what you have seen tonight rests upon the railways."

"They furnish a heavy proportion of the cases coming to these institutions. The commercial basis enters deeply into all their balance sheets; so you have the contract system. The man who, with compressed lips and steady hands, rides down to death for his passengers' sake is brought here, a thing of broken bones and quivering nerves, to fall into the unwilling hands of the contract surgeon. In towns like this he is usually a man whose professional standing is low, either from incompetency or personal disqualifications; one who is glad to render surgical services at about one-quarter of the private practice rating and the ownership of an annual pass. The doctor, of course, looks upon each case as a non-remunerative intrusion upon his sincere. The nurse's horizon rims entirely upon the man of the scalpel, so she unconsciously assumes an indifferent air. In my opinion nothing speaks higher of wonderful vitality or perfection of physique than the fact that despite intention and, oftener, gross neglect—a few wan, tottering wrecks emerge from these doors; to carry out into God's sunshine the nightmare recollection of slighting words, of lonely, feverish nights, or the rasp of neglected bandages over exposed, tortured nerves."

"It's all in the game," he added, a deepened light in the brave eyes. "Yes, but it's one worth playing to a finish," rejoined Gray softly. Then as the undertaker, followed by his sleepy assistant, with noiseless, buzzard alacrity, drifted through the hall, the silence of the last-played forfeit of the "game"—resting quietly waiting upon the knees of the gods—fell as a pall between them.

Finally Howe turned to John, and with a visible effort resumed his ordinary bantering semi-serious manner. "John," he said, "I've thought of a new scheme. I think I can work that doctor to get us a pass to Erie. We, of course, have no claim on the railroad, but they are always glad to get any evidence of wrecks out of sight. Lay low and watch my smoke. When we get to Erie, I don't think it any use to try to get over the Lake Shore; it's the hardest combination except the Pennsylvania main line in the United States. There is a legend that a rounder once got to the yard limit at some terminal on an out-going train, but no man ever had the nerve to relate it in a switch-shanty or bunk room."

"Now the Anchor Line boats run between there and Chicago—make it in five or six days. We can ship as deck hands—get transportation, board and lodging—and then when we get to Chicago we can go to work at once."

"It will be the correct thing for you. A man hailing from Chicago with any kind of a record at a yard master's desk. A young, quick man with a good Chicago reputation of being a first-class 'cutter' or 'felder' never decorates extra lists of 'slunk off' boarding house keepers."

"What do you mean by 'cutters' or 'felters'?" asked John. "When we get there I'll take you into the yards for a day or so. It will be no trouble to learn them," rejoined Howe, a trifle grimly.

CHAPTER V.

After an extremely frugal breakfast the doctor appeared. Howe put up the "pass talk." To John, who, as bidden, sat watching his "smoke," he seemed like a new boy, as in frankly innocent words he told how they wished to go to Erie, and, carefully suppressing any reference to railway affairs, told of their desire to go on the lakes.

The doctor, after patiently extracting all the apparent plans of his innocent patient, promised to "see what he could do for them." About an hour later a boy handed Howe a strip of blue paper which, after glancing it over, passed it to John, with the sly remark, "We are glass window people now."

John said that "Frank Howe and one were passed to Erie—according surgical department."

Then followed a long ride through, to John, this wonderful country. The great wide fertile valley, dotted thick

with red barns and cozy farm houses, or still shady streets of easy going towns stretching to unequalled pastures. Beyond the dim blue hills gradually shrank to a new and wilder beauty. Towering mountains, echo-haunted; with perpendicular sides bristling in massed hemlock, their evergreen needles quivering ever above the dash and roar of the narrow, fretted river at their feet.

Howe as the latter story bore him, John noticed in both cheek and nostril a strange dark odor.

Howe, in answer to the remark, "How damp and bad the air seems," replied: "It's the lake wind carrying the harbor odors."

After an uncomfortable night in a cheap hotel they set out for the docks. Howe singled out one from a number of white propellers.

"Lucky, there is the one we want," he exclaimed gleefully. "Old Walsh is her first mate."

Passing aboard he crossed to where, way bills in hand, a loosely built Irishman was busily checking off the lading of a string of bouncing trucks, stevedore propelled, passing in endless procession before him.

He raised a pair of kindly blue eyes and looked at the two newcomers. Then followed a quick broken conversation.

Howe returned to Gray saying: "It's all right, they are nearly full. Nail on to a truck." In a few minutes they were a part of the army of human ants, units of the perspiring onslaught directed against the mountain of boxes and barrels piled high on the wharf.

A few hours later they were aloft on tempestuous Erie. Then the smug beauty of the Detroit river, Detroit, wept St. Clair, ghostly under moonlight, the mighty rush of its river, then at daylight the prow cuts straight into the great Huron. To the Southern boy, standing over the prow ever cutting through the flashing water straight north, came inborn upon the sharp wind from the ever-receding gray band, where tossing and quiet blue met, a strong, misty, yet half-familiar sense of a previous knowledge, an odd feeling of home-coming. Over the wide expanse, glistening under the glowing July sun, came the brooding spirit of ever present autumn, of wide lonely wastes, of vast forests as dark as the grave and chilling in its silence, of brave deeds forgotten and unrecorded, of tender devotion or fierce revenge; of the roar of countless miles of driving snow and sleet or the smoky quiet of brief lovely summers, a thing of gloom and mystery and brooding silence—the incarnation of the somber shading resting against the fadeless red of the Norse blood. A magical blend of waters, shy and wild, where sorrowful regret and memory are ever present, and doubly blest is the rare few who, like our Virginia lad, can look into the woof clear-eyed, without a bruise on heart or a shadow on brain.

Then the froth of the cold water of Mackinaw rushed in fretted foam along the vessel's white sides, past the guardian point's lighthouse around Skil-lu-gal-lee and Warble Shanks. Then Lake Michigan, and on the sixth day in the early morning they entered Chicago's narrow harbor.

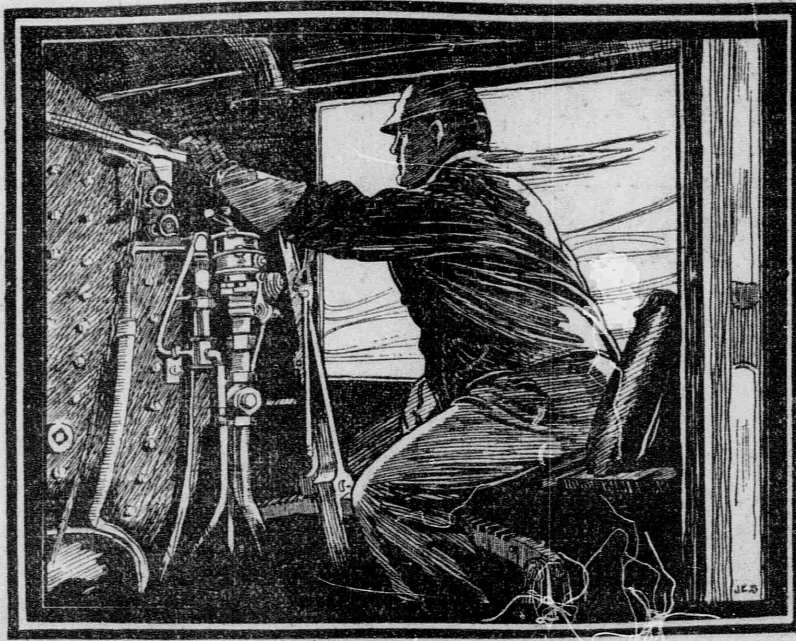
"Frank," said Gray as they "stood by their lines" before the entrance, "I've found out the true meaning of the term 'working your own way.' It's a way I'll take care not to work again in a hurry."

Howe looked upon the rueful face and answered sympathetically: "Well, I know it's been rather hard on a man used to every night's sleep, but here is Chicago, and I know there is an empty chair or two at Mammy Sullivan's. And, by the way, he remarked, 'you'd better crawl out of that gray suit and from under that old soft hat. I'll see you are fixed out in accordance with your looked condition.'"

Gray looked over his comfortable loose-fitting homespun with an air of decided approval, "I'm all right. What do you mean?"

"Just what I said," rejoined Howe quickly. "Your garb was the correct thing ten days since, but it is badly out of place now. You are going among men to whom every act of your past life will be in strong contrast to what they know and do. You will be rubbed hard, too hard, on other things to add the matter of clothing to a voluntary sum total. Whilst we are talking I'll give you a few pointers. You are a 'green' man and as such will be expected to receive a first-class hazing from your elders in service—all kinds of games will be put up on you—look out for the engineer who will try to send you to the caboose for the mislaid steam chest key, and the conductor who will try to return you with a fifty-pound drawhead on your shoulders, or the flagman who will send you hot-footed to the engine to beg a red oil for his red lamp, or the engineer who on a foggy night will get you out on the plot with a broom to sweep the fog away from the headlight. Look out for these and a dozen other old gags, but don't be too wise. Let them jolly you, but mark the ones who lead in the pastime. They are generally the best in the service. Ask them everything you don't understand, then act upon their information. If you don't catch on to what is expected of you, run around anyhow. Better to be ignorant and ambitious than dull and lazy. Look out for your fender. We are going into dock."

An hour later the companions were in a Clark street clothing house where an energetic clerk, calmly indifferent to Howard's gibes, was industriously endeavoring to put a forty-inch coat over Gray's forty-six shoulders. After many frantic gesticulations a suit was found large enough.



When a little silk cap surmounted the transformed figure Gray crossed to the mirror. He gazed upon the reflection in blank surprise. A laughing face appeared over his shoulder.

"Never saw that big fellow before, hey? It don't take much to make some kind of men—a well fitting coat, a decent piece of headgear"—Howe dodging the cuff intended for his ear preceded his laughing companion to the street.

"Now for a bath and breakfast," he said. "Over the meal Howe resumed his mentorship."

"Another thing, John," he continued. "The fellows we are going among are of a rough set, but it's only on the surface."

of the girl-like beauty of his face. From the time when he began school a tot in pinafores until now he has been known as "Girle." But the sweet face and girlish voice form one side of a paradox—braver heart or more reckless brain never formed part of the most masculine equipment. Watch me surprise him."

He slipped quietly up behind the unconscious figure and brought his hand down heavily upon its shoulder. An oath and as the overturned chair is kicked quickly back a lithe slender youth springs to his feet, blue eyes blazing, a hand flashed out to clutch Howe's neck, when the closed fist of the other poises like an arrested bolt.

violet eyes he understood why men had persecuted the childish name.

Oh! Girle, the lost friend of my youth, it may chance that these lines may fall before the eyes of some of the old boys who knew and loved you. If so, the teardrops in my eyes will repeat themselves in theirs, as out from a handful of ashes, across a quarter of a century of hair-blanching years will come the clinging touch of an eager hand, the merry ring of a boyish voice, and the vivid flash of a beaming face.

The greetings over, the party resettled themselves, and became, as Howe termed it, "a ways and means committee."

"Yes," said Girle, in answer to Howe's question, "You can both get work here. They are to put the two new engines in the south yard tomorrow, and I heard the general yard master tell the train caller to run out two full crews. Say, there he comes now."

John raised his eyes to meet those of a tall, lanky man of about forty. A scar traversed the left cheek, and three fingers were missing from the left hand.

"Lanigan," said Girle quickly, "here's

"All right," answered Lanigan good-humoredly. "Report at 6 a. m. tomorrow night to begin on Engine 45. How are you fixed for a boarding house?"

"Never mind about that," answered Girle. "I'll fix them out with me at my place—Mammy Sullivan's."

"Good Lord help them," piously growled the departing official.

"Now boys, I've some personal matters to attend to," resumed Girle. "So I'll show you the house. Go right into the kitchen and see Mammy. You won't be apt to miss her, he added, laughing.

A rising, the trio stood for a moment behind their chairs. From a table at a little distance a distinguished gentleman looked at them keenly, remarking to his companion: "There is a great future ahead of a country that can produce from its middle classes young men like those standing there. From their conversation, they are railway servants, as we call them in England, and nothing I've seen in your country has so impressed me with your luxurious prodigality of resources as that you have a supply of such chaps available for what we term mental work."

Look at the one they call Gray-tall, broad-shouldered, with a gray, quiet face and steady eyes—the true type of a life guardsman."

"The chap Howe, with the alert, quick intelligence of a high-bred young Oxonian, and the other with the face of a Greek god. Why, ten centuries of the best blood in Europe never produced a higher grade of the thoroughbred. I have done some things with brush and pencil that men have been kind enough to call good, but if I could make a composite of that trio, call it the 'Genius of America,' I'd be content to rest it as my claim upon posterity."

Then as the young men passed out to the street the eminent R. A. settled back into his chair with an envious sigh.

As they separated Girle said: "Use my name with Mammy. And say, another thing, that gang down there is tough and, you big reb," laying his hand affectionately on Gray's shoulder, "if any of them get gay down there, drive them through the floor, and do it quick and hard."

Gray looked at Howe in amused perplexity; it seemed his mentors were a little at variance.

"All right," he answered, with demure gravity, as under the impulse of a playful push he followed Howe down the street.

CHAPTER VI.

"Here we are," said Howe, when, after a brief walk they passed before a dingy three-story brick building. A saloon filled with a rough noisy lot of customers occupied the first floor. Over a street door opening upon a narrow, dirty flight of stairs hung a legend, "A. Sullivan, Boarding."

"This is our hash factory," he added, "and as the master mechanic in charge expects no cards, he will rush in where health inspector seemingly fears to tread."

Suited his action to the word, he coolly proceeded up the black stairway to the dingy, cabbage-laden atmosphere above. The disgusted Gray stumbled after him. Thought of the pure, fresh mountain breeze wafting through a certain long, cool hall, were unpleasantly obtrusive. In the long narrow hall they paused. From its far end came the jingle of tin, and the rasping growl of a coffee mill.

"Young man, advance," said Howe, grandiloquently. "I behold the throne room of the descendant of Irish kings—brace up. In one brief moment we will be in the presence."

They walked to the kitchen door. "Must have been a head-on collision between a crockery and tin-ware shop around here," whispered Howe, as they looked over the disturbed room.

On the opposite side a broad back—forming the extreme of the human division line between two vigorously plunging red elbows—was working over a mass of dough.

The boys both looked their surprise. "A Jumbo in petticoats," gasped Howe, in mock terror.

The great hands quickly filled a pan with biscuits, then turning to place them in the range her eyes fell on the awaiting pair.

A swift flash from the keen blue eyes, then the grizzled brows met in the fierce straight line of an incensed—rilla, and a heavy masculine voice said: "Well!"

Like the oft-quoted raven, "Only that and nothing more," but it was enough. The captain from the quarter-deck to the pilot who has just grounded the vessel on a charted rock; the general to the aid, who has lost the field map, or the superintendent to the fellow who has "forgot" use the same menace in banishing words.

For once Howe was dashed. "What are ye pair of ducks doing in here? Fly now before I throw a kettle of hot water over ye," was next hurled at them, followed by a dash toward the kettle singing merrily on the range.

Howe, backed toward the door, but John stepped forward, and with a courtly bow addressed the enraged despot in quiet, even tones.

"We beg your pardon, but finding no one in the front we ventured to intrude, and would like to get board with you. Can you kindly arrange to put us up?"

Mammy looked at the speaker in silence, then, as the flushed face darkened to a deeper hue, extended her hand saying, "The boys says I'm a holy terror, and I believe I am. Sure you can stay, and your friend, too. I wish I only had more like you."

John bowed with his best Virginian grace over the dough-flecked hand, saying simply, "I thank you."

Howe, recovering from his astonishment, here advanced to receive a hearty handshake.

"Now, don't remember how I jumped you a minute ago; a red-hot kitchen on a July day with ten hungry villains roaring for dinner, and no cook and no weighing over 300 pounds is enough to drive a saint to a lunatic asylum. Where did you blow in from?"

"From Erie," answered Howe. "I see you are a railroad man," rejoined Mammy, after a searching glance, "but, sure, your friend is not."

"But I intend to be," said Gray laughing.

"Intend to be," repeated Mammy sarcastically, "and sure for why? Ye are a gentleman and would be like a duck in the Sarany desert amongst the spalpeens in that business. Why, boy, I've run a railroad boarding house for years and I've seen hundreds of them come and go over my threshold. One day with a folne suit of clothes and a jag on and the next with their feet on the ground and their poor knees stickin' through their trousers. It's the life of a dog and a yellow one at that, me boy. Today sound and hearty, tomorrow smashed into flinders or howling on a hospital cot. Sick, no home or mother or sister to go to, no one old bear like myself to smash a dirty rag on your feverish forehead whilst the flies eat yer alive. Take an auld woman's advice and turn the broad of your back on the whole devil's job of it."

"Thank you, Mrs. Sullivan," interrupted that lady with a shake of her massive head. "I'm Mammy Sullivan to all of my boys."

"Well, Mammy," answered John, the familiar word casting a shadow of a faithful black face across his mind, "I think I'll like the work and I'll risk the rest."

"Like it! Ah! boy, then I've no more to say. You are not the great lad who has stood there and said those words. Well, may your ending be better than many of theirs. But, how did you come to find me?"

"We met an old friend and schoolmate of mine who directed us here," answered Howe.

"And who was he?" asked Mammy. "Will Mason, or as he is better known, Girle."

"Girle!" yelled Mammy, a wrathful gleam in her eyes, "and if I'd known ye were a friend of that murdering villain the kettle would have followed ye down the steps ten minutes ago."

"What's the trouble?" asked Howe in surprise. "Trouble," came the wrathful answer. "Sure that same young devil is the bother of me life. The beautiful face and ways of him have got tangled up in my heart-strings, so I mourn over his devilment like a fool mother. He will come in swearing drunk, start a fight with the first man he stumbles over, break up half of me furniture or come in the kitchen here, scare me cook off of the job and make junk out of me kettles and pans. Then in the morning when he has slept off his wholesale stock he will come to me with the look of a saint on the face of him. Then when I tell him to get the devil out of here, he will say something to me in the swate blarneying voice of him. Then I'll look into the pleading blue eyes of him and whilst, perhaps, I'm thinking how they look like the sun on Killarney, an arm will steal around my old neck, and the sweat voice in the world will whisper, 'Poor old Mammy, it's too bad, I'm sorry,' then—well Girle stays on."

Here some heavy missile crashed against the dining room door. Mammy, dashing the tears from her eyes, sprang—with amazing alacrity for one of her avoirdupois—to it, threw it open, then seizing the heavy chair lying upon the floor, threw it with one sweep of the wrist back, erect into its vacant place. Then stood arms akimbo, fiercely surveying eight demure faces ranged around the table. From eight bronze faces eight pairs of eyes met hers in gentle surprise.

"What's the matter, Mammy?" asked one of the group sympathetically. "Has the range dropped its crown sheet, or has the potato and coffee pots had an ender? You look excited. Take it easy, you will never gain flesh if you bound into gentlemen's presence cyclone style."

"I'll cyclone you," yelled Mammy, shaking her fist in the speaker's face. "You land pirates and roaring bums, I'll teach you to leave a chair against my kitchen door."

"Only a gentle reminder," broke in another gently, "of the sad fact that it's ten minutes past 12, and the oil cloth is yet running light."

"It's light in running, is it, Ed Ryan," answered Mammy, a world of wisdom in her tones. "Well, it's not right to interfere with anything light in this stock pen; don't worry, my boy. Devil a plate will darken it before 6 o'clock to-night."

Disregarding the pleading voices and outstretched hands, Mammy turned to the surprised Howe and Gray, saying: "Let the heathens howl. Sure a fast will do them good. Come with me, my boys, and we will have Irish stew—a howl from the penitent ones—and a fine juicy roast." Another jumble of beseeching sentences. "Say, Mammy, you don't mean it." "Don't rub it in!" "And Irish stew day at that." But unheeding Mammy sailed majestically behind the fortunate pair into the kitchen, when, after locking the door, she said, with a sigh of relief, "I'm glad Girle was not there. He would have stole the whole dinner whilst I was callin' the reds down."

The boys had a hard time to convince the generous old soul that they had just dined, and at Gray's suggestion set out to look the yards over, leaving Mammy quietly enjoying the coveted stew, unruffled by the pleading faces emitting woeful plants through the transom.

"What do you think of it?" asked Howe, as they reached the street.

"I never enjoyed anything more," answered Gray, laughing. "I wonder if she will relent."

"I doubt it," answered Howe. "There is a method in her madness. She has to keep some sort of discipline. The gang will enjoy the joke as well as herself, but I guess the chairs will be better behaved in her dining room in the future."

"Hope so," said Gray.

Passing down the street, they reached a fence where a good overlook of the yards could be had.

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